

# Parish of West Monkton in the Days of Queen Bess and James I.

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**I**N the depository of books and other documents belonging to the parish of West Monkton is preserved an ancient book, entitled "The Book of Accounts of the Parish of West Monkton, in the County of Somerset, as well for the Constables and Churchwardens, Collectors for the Poor, Waywardens, as for other Accountors whatsoever for the said Parish." From this book I have made several extracts, and now beg to submit them, with a few comments of my own, to the Somersetshire Archæological Society, believing they will prove interesting to its members, and useful as illustrating many passages in the History of Elizabeth and James I. They have also an especial local interest as evidencing the part which our ancestors bore in some of the most important events of those reigns as well as indicating the habits of the people of that age.

The accounts seem for the most part to have been neatly kept, and the entries to have been made with as much care and precision as are usually exhibited in the accounts of rural parishes in the present day; and the signatures of the parishioners attached to them (comparatively few being marksmen) attest the fact that, even in those early times, the village schoolmaster was not an unknown personage in West Monkton.

The extracts which I think the most deserving of attention are

I.—Those which relate to the maintenance of armour and the mustering of soldiers, the earliest accounts being for the year 1587. It must be borne in mind that at this period the Statute of Winchester, 13 Edw. I., was in force, by which “every man between the ages of 15 and 60 was to be assessed and sworn to keep armour according to the value of his lands and goods, and a view of this armour was to be taken twice in the year by constables chosen in every hundred.”\* The obligation of keeping sufficient arms, according to each man’s estate, was also preserved by Stat. 5 Philip and Mary, c. 2, and magazines of arms were formed in different places, and generally in each county. About this time, also, the power of calling into arms and mustering the population of each county, given in earlier times to the Sheriff or Justices of the Peace or to special Commissioners of Array, began to be entrusted to a new officer entitled the Lord Lieutenant.†

In illustration of the foregoing remarks we find the following entries of receipts and payments in the Constable’s Accounts for the year 1587.

\* 2 Hallam’s Constitutional History, 181. See also 1 Blackstone’s Com., 411.

† Idem 182, 183.

	£	s.	d.
Imprimis Received for the <i>Rate</i> of the Parishioners for the maintenance of armour	8	12	4
Item Received Collection gathered by Henry Sellick (then, I believe, owner of Walford) for the tithing for payment for armour & powder	4	10	2

## PAYMENTS.

Paid to Porters for carriage of armour (probably to the maga- zines I have before alluded to)	1	4	0
1588. Item paid Whitley (in which hundred West Monkton is situated) to the Constable King towards the Collection of £10 for the hundred muster	5	4	

There are many similar entries as to the maintenance of armour, but none after 1603, the "Statutes of Armour" having been repealed in the reign of James I.

II.—I will refer to those extracts from the Constable's Accounts which relate to the raising of soldiers (some evidently by impressment), the arming them, training them, dispatching them for foreign service, and relieving them when disabled by wounds.

It must be borne in mind that all the regulations before referred to for the maintenance of armour and the hundred musters had regard to the preservation of internal peace, and not to the raising of men for foreign service. So early as the time of Edward III. the arbitrary levies for foreign service, which, under previous sovereigns, had been found so vexatious to the people, were declared illegal by

1 Edward III., c. 5, a statute which Hallam designates as one "of by no means inconsiderable importance in our constitutional history."\* By this statute, subsequently confirmed by 4 Henry IV., c. 13, it was provided that no man should be compelled to go out of the kingdom at any rate, nor out of his shire but in cases of urgent necessity, nor should provide soldiers unless by consent of Parliament.† This statute continued in force throughout the reign of Elizabeth, though in many instances, as we shall presently see, it was practically disregarded by her.

It would appear, therefore, that during the reigns of Edward III. and his immediate successors, the successful resistance made by Parliament produced the discontinuance of compulsory levies for foreign warfare. "But under the house of Tudor, in conformity to their more despotic scheme of government, the salutary enactments of former times came to be disregarded, Henry VIII. and Elizabeth sometimes compelling the counties to furnish soldiers; and the prerogative of pressing men for military service, even out of the kingdom, having not only become as much established as undisputed usage could make it, but acquiring no slight degree of sanction by an Act, 4 & 5 Philip and Mary, c. 3, which, without repealing or adverting to the statutes of Edward III. and Henry IV., recognises, as it seems, the right of the Crown to levy men for service in war, and imposes penalties on persons absenting themselves from musters commanded by the King's authority to be held for that purpose."‡ Keeping in view, then, the foregoing observations, it appears to me that the following extracts from the West Monkton Constables' Accounts have a

\* 2 Hallam's Constitutional History, 178.

† 1 Blackstone's Commentaries, 411.

‡ 2 Hallam's Constitutional History, p. 179

peculiar significance as authorities for the practice at that time of pressing soldiers, and as confirmatory of the statements of modern historians that Elizabeth, relying less on the legislative authority of Parliament than on her own undisputed power and the submission of her subjects, was wont to stretch her prerogative by compelling the counties to furnish soldiers for foreign warfare. Thus :

	£	s.	d.
1588. Received of Constable King			
of money paid him before for		18	4
service into Ireland			

These probably were soldiers sent to Ireland to oppose the landing of the Spanish Armada, of whom 5394 were lost off that coast in this year.\*

## PAYMENTS.

	£	s.	d.
1588. Given press money at two			
several times ..			8

There are many similar entries.

## PAYMENTS.

1592. Imprimis paid to the Constable			
of Whitley for a service into France		8	0
Item for a pair of musketts ..	..	6	0
Bullet bag .. ..	..		6

The two following entries are curious as showing the point of embarkation of the soldiers raised within the hundred of Whitley.

	£	s.	d.
Item paid at Bridgwater at the going			
forth of the soldiers		1	9

\* 2 Rapin's History, 137, fol. ed

	£	s.	d.
Item with the wester limit of Whitley } for the fifth part of a Galliot }		5	4
(I presume a small vessel or transport.)			

## RECEIPTS.

(Henry Sellick, Constable.)

1593. Imprimis received for a } collection made for the service } into Britton }	1	13	8
Item received of collection made for a } service into Jersey and Garnsey }	2	6	6

In reference to the two last entries it may be remarked that in 1592 Elizabeth entered into a treaty with Henry IV. of France to furnish him with 4,000 men and ammunition to recover Bretagne from the Spaniards, and she performed her engagement by sending the armament there under the command of Norris.\*

## PAYMENTS.

	£	s.	d.
1593. Item paid to James Bullinge } for service into Brittani }	1	8	0
Ditto Jersey & Guernsey	1	3	0

## RECEIPTS.

1599, 1600, 1601. Received of the } parishioners for 2 services into } Ireland 1st year }	2	6	4
Ditto 2nd year	3	9	6

## WEST MONKTON.

1601. Imprimis received of the tithing } aforesaid for a service into Ireland }	1	13	19
a whole rate			

\* Rapin, vol. 2, p. 140.

In 1590 the rate was said to be "12d. of a yarde land," and in reference to the receipts for years 1599, 1600, 1601, it should be remembered that during these years large forces were sent to Ireland to quell a rebellion there which was aided by the Spaniards, who, in 1601, landed at Kinsale and took possession of the town, but were afterwards routed by the English.\*

## PAYMENTS.

	£	s.	d.
1599—1603. Paid for 12 pounds of powder	}	12	0
9 pounds of lead .. ..		1	0
Delivered to the trainers at Staplegrove			
2 pounds and half.			
1601. Delivered to the trained men at Bathpool 5 pounds powder.			

It does not appear, so far as I can ascertain, that Elizabeth obtained the sanction of her Parliament for the levy of the above soldiers who were sent "on service" into Ireland, France, Brittany, Jersey, and Guernsey, or had any legal authority whatever for sending them on foreign service, but, in so doing, she seems to have relied solely on her own prerogative and the submission of her subjects.†

It appears, however, that in 1593, "the Parliament, taking into consideration the Queen's great expenses, both in defending the kingdom against the Spanish Invasion and in assisting the French King and the United Provinces, granted her an extraordinary aid of money. But it was inserted in the Act that so large and unusual a supply, granted to a most excellent Queen, who made so good use of the public money, should not be drawn into a pre-

\* 2 Rapin's History, p. 155. 3 Sully's Memoirs, p. 118.

† Hume's History of England.

cedent." The laity granted three subsidies, together with six fifteenths, and the clergy two whole subsidies.\* Wherefore we find under years 1592, 1593:

## PAYMENTS.

	£	s.	d.
Item for writing of two subsidy books			8

The following entries illustrate the obligation on the parish to provide for their wounded soldiers, as well as the care which was taken of them on their return from foreign service.

## PAYMENTS.

	£	s.	d.
1588. Paid at the coming home of } the Portugal soldiers		6	6

## RECEIPTS.

1601. Item. Received of Inhabitants } a half rate for maimed soldiers		10	2
1603. Ditto		10	1

## LAYED OUT.

1603. Imprimis to George Roy for } maimed soldiers		17	4
For carriage of poor people and to } soldiers that travelled from the } wars for their relief		6	11
1610. Paid for maimed soldiers and } Hospitals at Wells Sessions		17	4
1612. Paid for maimed soldiers and } Hospitals at Taunton Sessions		12	8

The next entries deserving of notice are

\* Rapin, vol. 2, p. 141.



III.—Those which relate to what is termed “Queen’s Silver.” They are as follows:

RECEIPT OF QUEEN’S SILVER.

	£	s.	d.
1592. Imprimis of Richard Cridland } for Monkton Town }		19	9
Item of Thos. Prince for Gotten ..		10	0
Item of Nicholas Crosse for Overton ..		12	3

and throughout the subsequent years there are many similar receipts.

The following are entries of payments.

	£	s.	d.
1601. Item paid to Mr. Powlett for } the Queen’s Silver }		5	7 4
To Mr. Speke ditto ..		5	7 4
To Thos. Fraunceis the first Queen’s } Silver }		2	13 8

I can nowhere find the term “Queen’s Silver” used by historians as applicable to any branch of the royal revenues, although the somewhat analogous term of “Aurum Reginae” was employed about this time denoting a duty or sum paid to a queen consort. Probably it is synonymous with the term “subsidy,” now nearly represented by our modern land-tax, but this matter may be further elucidated by ascertaining what public office (if any) the persons to whom it was paid, viz., Mr. Powlet, Mr. Speke, and Mr. Fraunceis, at that time held. Mr. Powlet was without doubt a member of the family of Sir John Powlet, Marquis of Winchester, who was Lord of the Manor of West Monkton and sold it in 1572.

Hume\* says “Subsidies and fifteenths are frequently

\* History of England, vol. 6, p. 111.

mentioned by historians, but neither the amount of these taxes nor the method of levying them have been well explained."

Blackstone\* says "The lay subsidy was usually raised by Commissioners appointed by the Crown or the great Officers of State."

The foregoing entries may possibly afford a clue to the mode in which these taxes were levied.

IV.—The following entries, also from the Constables' Accounts, are deserving of notice and suggest enquiries on matters of local interest.

#### RECEIPTS.

	£	s.	d.
1592. Item received of Richard } Plentye for the relief of Taunton }		4	0

#### PAYMENTS.

1593. Item paid to Mr. Popham for } the relief of Taunton }		4	0
Ditto to James Bullinge for ditto ..		11	4
1611. Paid towards the relief of } Dunster and Minehead }		11	0

Whether these payments were obligatory or voluntary, or for what precise purpose they were made, does not appear, but this may possibly be elucidated by ascertaining whether Mr. Popham held any and what public office at that time, so as to enable us to judge whether the money was paid to him and others in their public character.

V.—The next entries are those relating to the relief of the poor.

It will be borne in mind that the first important statutory provision for the relief of the poor was that of the 43rd

\* 1 Commentaries, p. 311.

Elizabeth, hence, in the book from which all the foregoing extracts are made, we should not expect to find any entries of payments for the relief of the poor prior to the year 1601, when the above statute was passed, and, in point of fact, it appears that prior to that time the only rates which were levied for the purposes of relief were exclusively for the relief of "maimed soldiers."

It should also be noted that the term "Overseer of the Poor" was unknown until the 39th of Elizabeth. By the 27th Henry VIII. and some subsequent statutes, persons were appointed to make "collections" for the poor on Sundays. Hence the words at the heading of our book, commencing in 1587, "Collectors for the Poor."

The 1st sec. of the above-mentioned Act of 43 Elizabeth directed the overseers to raise by taxation of the inhabitants "a convenient stock of flax, hemp, wool, thread, iron, and other necessary ware and stuff to set the poor on work." Accordingly I find the following entry made in the year 1603 (two years after the passing of the Statute), "Received one hatchet, one shoule, and a besgue," which I cannot doubt were handed over by the previous overseer, having been bought by the parish to set the poor to work.

The earliest payments towards the relief of the poor recorded in the West Monkton book are the following :

	£	s.	d.
1603. For carriage of poor people, and to soldiers who travelled from the wars for their relief		6	11
1611. Paid for bread and carriage of a poor man from Walford to Taunton		6	
Paid to a poor man that was borne from Walford to Taunton by the parish		7	

	£	s.	d.
1612. Paid for carriage of a poor woman			
ditto			6
Paid for carriage of the same woman			
and her child from the 'Spital' (a			
hospital in West Monkton parish			8
close to Taunton) back again to			
to Walford with meat and drink			
Paid to a poor man that had great loss			
by fire			8
1613. Paid to two men to bear a poor			
man from the Spital to Walford in		1	0
a barrow the 19th of April			
And bread and meat for the same man ..			2

It may be mentioned here that Walford is the parish boundary eastward; and it may be inferred from the foregoing entries that at this spot, where an ancient inn formerly stood, being the point of junction between the parishes of West Monkton and Creech St. Michael, the poor were transferred from the custody of one set of parish officers to that of the other.

The severity of our ancient laws for the suppression of vagrancy; and other infringements on personal liberty of a similar character have often been commented on by historians; and particularly a commission in July 1595, granted to Sir Thomas Welford, commanding him on notice by Justices of the Peace to seize, and in their presence to execute, such notable, rebellious, and incorrigible offenders as were worthy to be speedily executed, by martial law. This peremptory style of superseding the common law has been designated as "a stretch of prerogative without an adequate parallel."\*

\* 5 Hume's Hist. of England, 388. 1 Hallam's Constitutional History, 328.  
VOL. XI., 1861-2, PART II. X

But these and similar enactments and proclamations were clearly intended rather for the suppression of tumult, riot, and rebellion than for the punishment of vagrants merely. The Act of the 43rd Elizabeth, before quoted, which is the foundation of our present system of poor-law administration, was conceived in a just and humane spirit, and the extracts above given, which are probably among the earliest which any parish can furnish, indicating the mode in which relief, then for the first time rendered compulsory, was afforded, exhibit a judicious and considerate care for the wants of the destitute poor. Further evidence is afforded of the attention which at this period was paid to the wants of the poor, especially the sick poor, by the examination of the Overseers' Accounts for West Monkton for many subsequent years. Nor was this humane spirit confined to the limits of the parish of West Monkton; the following extracts from an account book for the adjoining parish of North Petherton, of a somewhat later date, show that there was no grudging of money to obtain the assistance of nurses when required, as well as the best surgical skill which the science of that day could produce.

## NORTH PETHERTON.

Disbursements of Alex. Nowell, Overseer of the Poor.

	£	s.	d.
1680. To Susan Nation in lameness ..	2	0	
To her, more .. ..	3	6	
To intending of her .. ..	4	0	
To Curry the chirurgeon for her ..	2	0	
To keeping of Susan Nation at Bridgwater	5	0	
To Mr. Haviland for cutting off Susan Nation's leg	4	0	0

The two next items tell in simple and touching phrase the result of all this well-intended care and treatment.

	£	s.	d.
For stretching her forth and shrouding her	3	8	
For 4 porters to carry her to church	2	6	

Making a total of £5 2s. 8d. expended for this poor woman's relief—an example of liberality to be remembered by Poor Law Guardians in succeeding ages.

VI.—Next in order are the Churchwardens' Accounts, which commence in 1590 and extend over a series of years. They present but few features of interest and are deserving of notice chiefly in connection with the recent discussions on the subject of church rates. One remarkable circumstance is that the sum raised by rate by no means constitutes the whole fund, and, in some years, not even the largest part of the fund which came into the hands of the churchwardens for maintaining the church and defraying the necessary expenses connected with the celebration of divine worship. The sources of this fund seem to have been multifarious. A certain amount was derived every year from payments for seats: thus we find in 1590 a payment to the churchwardens from Henry Sellick, the then owner of Walford, of 4d. for a seat, and similar payments from ten other parishioners whose names are enumerated, showing that at this early period pew-rents, or at least some payments analogous thereto, were in existence, and were applicable to the repairs of the church.

Another source of income arose from burials in the church, thus :

	£	s.	d.
1615. Received of Nicholas Crosse for his wife to be buried in the church }	6	8	

And there are similar entries in the accounts of many other years. Sums were also received for "Knella."

There are likewise two or three entries of the following description :

	£	s.	d.
1593. Item received of Standfast for that he refused to be warden }		6	8
There is a remarkable entry in the year			
1607. Item to the building of the parish Church of St. Dennis in Cornwall, } with a hospital of St. Lawrence } with a chapel }		2	6

I am not aware of any connection between that parish and West Monkton, but we may probably infer from the above entry, that it was the custom in those days as well as in our own, to ask for contributions towards the promotion of any meritorious objects, however unconnected they may be with the interests of those from whom aid is solicited, and however distant from the sphere of their observation and control.

These accounts also afford evidence that the practice which has been so frequently and justly condemned in modern times, of having recourse to the church rate as a means of re-imbursement for money expended (though foreign to the purposes for which the rate was made), which could not be legitimately charged elsewhere, is of older date than many of us suspect. Thus we find—

	£	s.	d.
1618. Item paid for maimed soldiers and hospitals more than our rate came to }		3	0
(See constables' accounts supra.)			
Item to John Burd for a brief that was delivered in the "Sizes" }		2	0

VII.—I will bring this paper to a close by a few extracts from the last accounts in the ancient book, under consi-

deration, being the Waywardens' Account for the year 1605.

The sum total received of the inhabitants during that year appears to have been £2 15s. 1d., nearly one half of which was disbursed to the "Pitchers" of the "Footways" and to the "Paviours," whose labours, we may hope, were not so productive of dust in the parish, as those of the "Macadamized" stone breakers of the present day. The remainder of the money collected, namely, £1 8s. 7d. was expended "about the mending of Bathpool bridge," which was subsequently, by order of Court of Quarter Session at Taunton, 21 James I., ordered to be repaired by the county, and has so continued to be repaired ever since.

There is no doubt that this reparation of the bridge by the parish of West Monkton was considered at that time a matter of public importance, and worthy of being commemorated; for the account concludes with "a note of those that brought stones and timber to the aforesaid bridge, and of those that laboured thereabout," and then follows a list of their names and of the services they rendered, which need not be detailed here. And with this transcript I will conclude;—hoping that as many illustrious names have been handed down to posterity and immortalised by their virtues and deeds of renown,—so may the names of these humble labourers of West Monkton recorded in the archives of our parish be remembered as men who, in their lowly sphere of duty, faithfully performed the useful work allotted to them, and have gone to their rest with the consciousness, we may also be permitted to hope, that they have not "spent their strength for nought, and in vain."